



The Prang Textbooks of Art Education and the Emergence of a Transcendentalist Voice in Art Education Curricula

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The Prang *Textbooks of Art Education* and the Emergence
of a Transcendentalist Voice in Art Education Curricula

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Bonnie E. Snow infused her Transcendentalist-influenced teaching philosophies into the pages of the *Text Books of Art Education*. These books, referred to as the *Prang Art Textbooks*, were published by the Prang Educational Company at the turn of the 19th century. The *Prang Art Textbooks* reflected a modern art education system that was very different from the industrially focused drawing manuals that preceded them.

The Transcendentalists of the 1840s were reacting against notions of rationalism and the grip of the Industrial Revolution. The expression of the Transcendentalist philosophy in the *Prang Art Textbooks* was influenced by two colliding events at the end of the 1890s: the first was public consensus that education reform could ameliorate the perceived decline in morals believed to be the result of the Industrial Revolution; the second was a public outcry for more robust art curricula in public schools.

Snow created the *Prang Art Textbooks* to address these two prevailing issues. She introduced a systematic art curriculum to teach art principles infused with a Transcendentalist tone. With the publication of the *Prang Art Textbooks*, the pendulum in art education began swinging from the utilitarian, industrially focused instruction of commercial drawing books to a nature-focused, emotionally influenced method of teaching that embraced a form of artistic instruction that went beyond mere drawing lessons.

Author's Biographical Sketch

Elizabeth Stewart Dunford was about 7 years old when she watched Snow White charm the birds around her as she sang. Lizzy, as her family affectionately calls her, didn't doubt for a moment that if she could sing as sweetly as Snow White, she too could have birds flock to her. There have been many failed attempts with the birds over the years; however, Elizabeth is still singing. Her 7-year-old singing aspirations developed into a vocal performance scholarship. The scholarship was followed by a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music, with an allied emphasis in Photography, from the University of Utah. While pursuing her music degree at the University of Utah, she relished performing throughout Europe and Asia. Since finishing her Bachelor of Arts, she has maintained a private teaching studio.

Elizabeth's interest in the fine arts and humanities led her to pursue an ALM degree with an emphasis in Visual Arts. The artist's books she created while taking a graduate book-making class were featured in the *Harvard Gazette* and one of her books won the Art Book Category of the prestigious New England Book Show. She has shown her artwork—photography, artist's books, and mixed media—in various galleries in Boston, the greater Los Angeles area, and Salt Lake City.

Elizabeth and her husband, Michael, are the creators and owners of the chocolate company, *Cocoa Metro*. *Cocoa Metro* began in 2009 as a kitchen-based pursuit and has grown into a nationally distributed consumer products company.

Dedication

To Michael, my muse, best friend, and eternal companion. Your selfless support throughout our 18 years of marriage is one of the innumerable reasons you are endeared to me. Thank you for making my ambitions your own. To our children, Stewart, Ella Sophia, Thomas, and Emmaline, who are their own people. Your interests and discoveries often differ from my own and reveal untapped delights.

Thank you to my mother, Betty Lou Stewart, for your unfailing optimism and belief in my capabilities. Thank you to my late father, Dr. D. Michael Stewart, who first introduced me to the elevating words of Emerson and Thoreau. Thank you for using our nature walks in Big Cottonwood Canyon to teach me lessons of life. I have a hearing heart and see the unseen because of you. I miss you dearly.

Lastly, thank you to a loving Heavenly Father for supplying tender mercies along the way that sustain me and strengthen my testimony that You know Your children individually.

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Table of Contents

Author's Biographical Sketch	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgments	vi
List of Figures	viii
Preface	1
Chapter I. Historical Background	6
Chapter II. The WATA, Snow, and the <i>Prang Art Textbooks</i>	15
Chapter III. Methodology and Analysis of <i>Prang Art Textbooks</i>	26
Chapter IV. Summary and Introduction of Color Book	42
Appendix. <i>ReDiscover Color: An Outside Guide to Rediscovering Color in Nature</i>	44
Bibliography	61

List of Figures

Fig. 1 <i>The Fiftieth Birthday of Agassiz</i> , Prang Art Textbook, Book II, page 1	21
Fig. 2 <i>Come out of Doors</i> , Prang Art Textbook, Book II, page 2	22
Fig. 3 <i>Autumn</i> , Prang Art Textbook, Book II, page 3	23
Fig. 4 <i>Stained Glass</i> , Prang Art Textbooks, Book III, page 55	29
Fig. 5 <i>Shapes and Growth of Trees</i> , Prang Art Textbooks, Book IV, page 5	30
Fig. 6 <i>An Apple</i> , Prang Art Textbooks, Book II, page 22	31
Fig. 7 <i>Pussy Willows</i> , Prang Art Textbooks, Book II, page 23	32
Fig. 8 <i>Sunset</i> , Prang Art Textbooks, Book III, page 10	33
Fig. 9 <i>The Out of Door World</i> , Prang Art Textbooks, Book IV, page 2	34
Fig. 10 <i>You Hold a Gift</i> , Prang Art Textbooks, Book VI, page 1	36
Fig. 11 <i>Come and Play</i> , Prang Art Textbooks, Book I, page 3	38
Fig. 12 <i>The Gift of Art</i> , Prang Art Textbooks, Book V, page 1	40
Fig. 13 <i>O Happy Little Children</i> , Prang Art Textbooks, Book I, page 14	41

Preface

At the turn of the 19th century, a systematic and thorough method was used to teach the elements of art in public schools. After researching the arts curricula of that time, I feel a bit like an attendee of the Great Exhibition of 1876 may have felt. I come away from my research with the impression that, just like America's representation in the arts was lacking at that time, instruction in modern arts, in general, and the instruction of color in public elementary schools, in particular, has somehow evaporated.

The ability to see and discriminate color emphasized in the past is no longer offered in public schools. My hypothesis that colors beyond basic primary or secondary colors are not systematically taught throughout the grades is based upon my experience as a student of public schools; my experience as a mother of elementary and middle-school students in highly rated school districts in Massachusetts, California, and Utah; and my experience teaching the arts in elementary schools. Interviews with arts educators and teachers across the country inform my hypothesis that we are missing the key element of color theory instruction in arts education.

At the beginning of my research, I contacted a handful of scholars in Harvard's Graduate School of Education whose areas of study relate to the Arts. I asked them if they thought color theory (outside of primary and secondary colors) was adequately taught in public elementary schools today. Professor Howard Gardner's humorous response supported my initial hypothesis: "Thank you for your thoughtful question. I

suspect that in the U.S., this is NOT taught or I would have learned my colors” (personal email correspondence).

In an interview with Kira Krukowski, a California kindergarten and first grade teacher, I learned that, while California state standards require the teaching of colors, no arts curriculum or textbook is supplied by the state or district to assist in teaching those requirements. Teachers are essentially left to their own devices when it comes to art instruction (personal email correspondence).

In elementary schools without a dedicated art program, art teaching is often left to inexperienced teachers with neither formal art training nor access to curriculum or dedicated art textbooks. This results in art instruction that is insular and siloed rather than in a progressive style of art instruction where principles are introduced and then built upon through successive grade years.

Exceptions do exist—some schools do provide art instructors; however, their presence still does not guarantee that a uniform and holistic approach to teaching principles of art exists. Most school districts in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, for instance, have designated art teachers assigned to their elementary schools. Whether or not a particular elementary school’s art program includes a path for students to learn color theory depends on the individual art teacher. According to my research, certain principles of art, such as color theory, are still routinely left off the art curriculum canvas. Richard King, Fine Arts Director of the Newton School District, confirms that students are not taught color discrimination: "Middle school teachers have told me that students enter middle school and don't know the difference between primary, secondary, and tertiary colors" (telephone interview). This revelation is not a surprise. I interviewed

Diane Jaquith, current arts teacher in the Newton school district, published author of books on teaching art, and a pioneer of a modern movement to capture children's attention in the classroom by allowing them to make their own art-based decisions. She spoke candidly about the lack of time allotted to teach the arts and how the effects of too little time have resulted in letting the children teach themselves color theory: "My theory with regards to teaching children color theory is to let the children figure out colors by supplying them with paints and paintbrushes. There is no time to teach more than that. Should we be teaching more than that? Yes!" (telephone interview).

When I compare modern arts curricula with arts curricula at the turn of the 19th century, I find the results disappointing. Although teachers in public schools have a mandate to teach principles of art, including color theory, to their students, they do not have access to modern art curricula; they have no formal set of textbooks nor graded lessons they can use to teach their students how to identify and describe what they see—to gain visual literacy. The art curricula in public schools has, in general, been marginalized to the point of near extinction, and intelligent discussions of color theory have all but vanished. The haphazard approach to art instruction followed by current public schools contrasts starkly with the orderly progression of art instruction established for each grade year with the *Prang Art Textbooks*, a series of art textbooks published at the turn of the 19th century.

The emergence of the *Prang Art Textbooks* occurred when there was public awareness of the need for a robust arts curriculum in public schools. The Great Exhibition of 1876 was instrumental in creating the awareness and subsequent public discourse. The ensuing organization of the Western Art Teachers Association (WATA)

was a proposed solution to combat America's substandard art representation, painfully highlighted at the Exhibition. What impetus will lead the public to a renewed understanding of the importance of art education in our day?

Art education has been relegated to the outskirts of the public school's teaching landscape. The ramifications of the absence of robust art curricula upon our communities will only become more poignant over time—from a professional and productivity perspective as well as from a more personal or spiritual level.

We live in a visually rich era. Visual design is a major factor in our modern internet-based communications, consumed almost constantly via television, computer, tablet, and phone. Text and images are continually before us in an ever-increasing quantity and sophistication. Even as the world becomes more visual around us, the majority of children receive little instruction in visual acuity. This lack of instruction can affect their professional lives. The myriad graphs, reports, and visual data that must be consumed, understood, and acted upon are potentially less effective in the hands of someone who does not possess the background and, hence, the visual knowledge of even a basic art education.

The cumulative effect of children gorging themselves on an all-you-can-eat banquet of technology for hours and hours every day parallels the adverse effects of the Industrial Revolution. Whereas many during the Industrial Revolution were relegated to work at an assembly line or a small workbench for staggeringly long hours, many of our generation voluntarily relegate themselves to screen and keyboard for a staggering number of hours of the day and night. I see two main issues with our modern-day Technology Revolution plight:

1. Many of our youth spend little to no time in raw nature. Their exposure to forms of beauty not represented by pixels is almost nonexistent.
2. Most of these same youth receive little to no visual training that would help them to understand and, therefore, better appreciate the natural world around them. If they do not have the tools to see, they cannot be expected to appreciate their surroundings in their fullest.

When children understand more about their environment, they become active participants rather than idle observers. From a visual perspective, if a person understands something about the interactions of color, he or she can more fully appreciate the subtle nuance of changing color patterns in the slowly shifting light at sunrise. The need to take children outside and teach them a visual language to describe and comprehend the beauty they see is relevant and important. The efforts led by educators like Bonnie E. Snow, co-author of the *Prang Art Textbooks*, at the turn of the 19th century to counter the backlash of the effects of the Industrial Revolution upon society resonate with me amidst the current Technology Revolution.

I have unique perspective on the current state of art education in our public schools. As a student, I have spent the last four years researching and comparing modern and historic art curricula. As a mother of four children, an artist, a former public school art teacher, and a homeschool parent, I have experienced firsthand the dearth of art education. With the knowledge I have gained, I feel compelled to do something. While I am an idealist, I am not ignorant of the fact that my small efforts may have limited impact; however, I will add my voice to the many who are calling for a renaissance in public art education.

Chapter I

Historical Background

Arthur Efland's book, *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts*, documents the rise of art education during the 1800s. Efland provides a focused explanation of the entrance of European Romantic Idealism into American education through New England Transcendentalists. With his discussion of Amos Bronson Alcott's Temple School in Boston, Efland illustrates how Transcendentalist views were being applied in 1840. Efland's scholarship is significant, marking the entrance of Transcendentalist sentiment into American education. Efland discusses how Amos Bronson Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody, two early educators in the 1830s, fostered principles and theories of Transcendentalism and infused them into American education. Peabody's exposure to Transcendentalism under the auspices of Alcott determined her subsequent involvement in establishing the Kindergarten movement in America. The Kindergarten movement's guiding tenets about children and their relationship with nature are aligned closely with Transcendentalist principles.

Prior to the publication of the *Prang Art Textbooks* in the late 1890s, elementary art curricula do not show evidence of a Transcendentalist influence, even though Transcendentalist ideals had begun to shape general elementary educational movements in the mid-1800s. The reason for the time lapse between the entrance of the Transcendentalist philosophy into education and its expression in the *Prang Art Textbooks* can be found by a closer examination of the advent of the education

reformation movement. The importance of art education was not yet established when Transcendentalist philosophy first entered public education. In *American Manuals for Art Instruction in the Public Schools: Progress, Prophecy, and Art for the Millennium*, Sally Sorensen Gross provides an historical explanation for the ambivalence and skepticism among Americans over the importance of public education. The ambivalence about providing all children with an organized and systematic public education created a sterile environment for early art educators attempting to find support for art education in the schools. Their attempts in the 1840s gained little traction. A 1926 “Report of the Committee on Elementary School of Education” discusses the futile efforts of Philadelphia artist Rembrandt Peale, in 1840, and Baltimore architect William Minifie, in 1848, to garner support for incorporating drawing into general education (University of Chicago). Early attempts by educators to introduce drawing coincided with the infancy of an organized public education. Early art educators were unable to foster an appreciation for art education until public education found its footing with widespread acceptance. However, the art educators’ early efforts did create a dialog and an awareness among other educators in cities across the eastern United States (Gross 77-80).

An example of the culminating effects of early education efforts can be seen in the educational reformation work of Horace Mann (1796-1859), the first superintendent of the Boston public schools. Mann’s efforts to create a free, organized, and graded curriculum coincided with growing public awareness and consensus for the need to counter the effects of the Industrial Revolution. He argued that universal public education was the best way to turn the nation’s unruly children into disciplined citizens. Mann traveled to Prussia to observe educational methods in the Prussian public school system.

While in Prussia, he was impressed with the way educators there used drawing as a type of language, as an aid to teaching writing, and as a means of appreciating beauty. Upon his return to Massachusetts, Mann implemented drawing lessons at the state's public schools. This implementation of drawing as a core subject in Massachusetts soon spread to many states. Mann was the first person to make any real attempt to incorporate art into the school curriculum; he accomplished this via his publication of Peter Schmidt's system of drawing instruction in 1844 and 1845. The adoption of a systematic education system throughout Massachusetts in 1852 revolutionized public education and influenced the direction of other states.

Mann's defining work underscored the importance of public education and created a foundation for the establishment of art education. In 1870, Massachusetts passed legislation requiring drawing to be a school subject. In the same year, the legislature passed the Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870, providing art instruction for public school teachers. Business owners and affluent citizens who were once wary that their taxes would be used for public education—a service not needed by their children, who were enrolled in private schools—became some of the loudest supporters of the grass-roots efforts leading to Massachusetts's adoption of drawing as a subject of general education (Efland 127). Once drawing was accepted as an integral part of a modern education curriculum, art educators sought a systematic way to teach art. While the objectives in art education changed over the following decades, art instruction was solidly recognized as an integral part of a modern education program.

The ambivalence over public education during the middle of the 19th century resulted in a sluggish start for educational reform. However, the Great Exhibition in 1876

raised awareness of the importance of education—specifically, art education—and ultimately influenced the creation of the *Prang Art Textbooks*. The United States was host to the Great Exhibition in 1876, which coincided with the 100th anniversary of the American Colonies’ independence from Great Britain. The United States was a young democracy and undoubtedly felt a latent pressure to impress the visiting countries. The purpose of the world exhibition was to highlight the achievements of the various countries participating in the event. One of the central themes of the exhibition was the advancement of the arts. The exhibition was a success in terms of the support and involvement of the other countries; however, there was a sense of inadequacy in America’s art representation (Sargent 1). The young democracy’s fledgling attempts in the arts gave flight to a focus on art education in the public schools.

The Industrial Revolution transformed the American population during the middle of the 19th century and influenced the educational reform movement. An influx of immigrants to the United States during the mid-19th century did not help; Mann reported in 1849 that more than half of Boston’s 10,162 public school students were children of immigrants. Not only was there an influx of immigrants to larger cities, but there was also an influx of farm workers leaving the country to find higher-paying jobs in factory cities. City leaders feared that the influx was “countervailing the Puritan leaven of our people, and reducing the scale of public morality and public intelligence” (Schultz 256). Local civic leaders and educators felt that the morals of America were declining as the numbers of immigrants increased. They believed educational reform could counter declining morals. With people flooding into the cities, the educational reform movement that had seen little progress prior to the 1850s was energized. The city population growth

created a consensus that educational reform was necessary (Efland 1990). Former critics of the importance of public education before 1850 feared cultural dissolution, but they now supported an educational reform project that could instill moral instruction. These and other significant events both directly and indirectly affected the American educational system.

F. Wygant, a scholar of art education and author of *School Art in American Culture*, provides information on the newly emerging aesthetic philosophy. He also provides evidence of how this philosophy was implanted in the school system. Wygant outlines Mann's role in influencing how art was taught in the schools of Massachusetts. Although Mann is not known as a Transcendentalist, his impressions of the importance of teaching art to a child are founded in Transcendental philosophy. In his role as superintendent, Mann wrote,

Teaching a child to draw, then, is the development in him of a new talent—the conferring upon him, as it were, of a new sense,—by means of which he is not only better enabled to attend to the common duties of life, and to be more serviceable to his fellow-men, but he is more likely to appreciate the beauties of magnificence of nature, which everywhere reflect the glories of the Creator into his soul. (Wygant 134)

Mann's adoption of art education into the public school system and his persuasive argument of the didactic nature of art were widely influential in educational reform and ultimately had an impact on art education.

In her dissertation, *American Manuals for Art Instruction in the Public Schools: Progress, Prophecy, and Art for the Millennium*, Sally Sorensen Gross discusses several reasons why a new focus on art education evolved across America. In addition to her contribution to an understanding of the reasons for the new focus on art education, she

brings to light how art education textbooks changed from strictly industrial drawing manuscripts—teaching how to create drawings that visually communicate how something functions or is constructed—into textbooks that focused on the realms of aesthetics and beauty in art creation. Gross discusses how the predecessor of the *Prang Art Textbook* curricula, *American Text Books of Art Education*, authored by Walter Smith, filled a need at the time to offer children a systematic graded instruction manual in drawing. However, Smith’s manual later failed to meet the demands of educators who wanted to teach children more than just mechanical drawing skills (Gross 192).

Smith, a graduate of Britain’s South Kensington Art School, was recruited jointly by the city of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to create a systematic art curriculum. His textbook, credited as the first American art text, was highly utilitarian in focus. The value of drawing was limited to acquiring a skill. Smith states in his 1873 book, *American Text Books of Art Education*, “All kinds of elementary drawing shall be taught as a language, not as an art, and be used as an instrument, not as a plaything” (Revised edition (1884) 10). Gross argues that Walter Smith’s focus on industrial and manual drawing was too narrow to meet the growing demands of art educators who sought a curriculum that also embodied the training of aesthetics and the appreciation of beauty. American educators were unhappy with Smith’s art curriculum which emphasized industrial and manual drawing while ignoring the training of a child’s innate ability to appreciate beauty in nature. Gross comments that the *Prang Art Textbooks* were an answer to art educators’ specifications. She states that the *Prang Art Textbooks* were progressive because “art instruction was given in a series of manuals designed for a specific grade level, they concentrated on type forms, they gave examples from nature

and of historic ornament and design, and they stressed the way in which type forms had practical applications in the construction of objects for daily use.” Gross’s research concludes that the *Prang Art Textbooks* were distinct from earlier art education curricula, but she does not provide a detailed analysis of them (Gross 192). It is in this regard that my thesis contributes to scholarship on the history of art education in its close examination of the *Prang Art Textbooks*.

The Western Art Teachers’ Association (WATA) is an essential source in making the connection between the *Prang Art Textbooks* and Transcendentalism. The “First Annual Report” of the association notes that the “benefits of intercourse and exchange of ideas” at the Chicago World’s Fair between art educators led to the formation of WATA. Its mission was to advance arts education in America by teaching truth and beauty as witnessed in nature. Founded in 1893, the organization emerged just prior to the release of Snow’s *Prang Art Textbooks*. In attendance at WATA conferences were grade school and collegiate-level teachers and educators representing states from across the country. Also in attendance were superintendents, state and local school board representatives, and civic leaders. Transcendentalist themes were woven throughout the lectures of the founding leaders and speakers at the conferences. An example of this is seen in the WATA opening address in 1896, given by the WATA president, Harriet Cecil Magee, who described the mission statement for the association: “We stand for that art which is the translation of truth and beauty otherwise unrecognized” (1896 WATA 14). In this same lecture, she also argues for the importance of nature as another educational influence:

It is this bringing nature to the child, and this bringing the child to nature, for which we plead...Pour the sunshine, we say into our dark, dreary

schoolrooms; bring in color and plant and animal life, and flood the hearts and lives of our school children with nature's strong, wholesome currents and we shall have sweeter, better, and nobler types of manhood and womanhood in their future than we have in our present. (1896 WATA 14)

Most significantly, Snow, co-author of the *Prang Art Textbooks*, held leadership positions in the organization, and she often attended and lectured at the annual conferences. In fact, Snow was president and vice-president of the organization for multiple years. Snow's lectures and the discussions she led at the WATA conferences were filled with ideals and principles that reflected Transcendentalist philosophy and the vision of the organization. The Transcendentalist tone of the WATA conferences and Snow's close ties to this important educational association are significant to the development of the *Prang Art Textbooks*.

Although scholarship on the history of art education establishes the fact that the social climate of the 19th century demanded a new, robust art curriculum, there is very little reference to WATA. Current art education scholarship does not discuss how WATA, a national art teachers' association, was influenced by Transcendentalist philosophy nor how that philosophy was integrated into 19th century art teachers' perspectives on art education. The *Prang Art Textbooks*, a little-examined series of art education textbooks, were products of that time. Using historical materials dating from the 19th century—specifically, lectures of art educators found in school board meetings, archival material related to WATA, and, most importantly, the *Prang Art Textbooks* themselves, I will show just how Transcendentalism influenced art teachers and art education in the 19th century. Because of the transcendentalist movement's influence on WATA and its members, 19th century art education, as illustrated by Snow's *Prang Art*

Textbooks, went from being merely utilitarian and mechanical to an exploration of aesthetic value, the beauty of art, and an appreciation for nature.

Chapter II

The WATA, Snow, and the *Prang Art Textbooks*

A prevailing principle of American Transcendentalism regarded nature not only as beautiful but as an extension of Divinity, literally the face of God. According to this philosophy, a person can get closer to God through, and be inspired by, nature because it is God's reflection. Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the founding fathers of American Transcendentalism, introduced these ideas initially in his essay, "Nature" (1849). Emerson again suggests the impact of nature upon an individual in his 1837 speech, "American Scholar," given to the Phi Beta Kappa Society: "The first importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature" (*Essential Writings* 45). Emerson explains that individuals who observe the natural world become students of nature. As students, they see the similarities between their minds and nature; their understanding of themselves is enhanced and their capacity is enlarged (Manzari 1792).

Emerson also extols the ennobling relationship between art and nature upon an individual: "A study of admirable works of art sharpens our perceptions of the beauty of Nature; that a certain analogy reigns throughout the wonders of both; that the contemplation of a work of great art draws us in to a state of mind which may be called religious. It conspires with all exalted sentiments" ("Society and Solitude" 21). Emerson suggests an examination of fine art heightens an individual's ability to appreciate the beauty of nature. Once an appreciation of nature is established, the individual's ability to see the connections between nature and a higher power will be

enhanced. Under Emerson's definition of Transcendentalist tenets, having an association with a higher power, nature, and beauty were of primary importance for the development of an individual.

By the late 1850s, Transcendentalism as a movement had subsided. However, the Transcendental ideas had permeated the American culture (Rubin & Casper 120). The tenets of Transcendentalism had even filtered into education, as indicated by evidence found in WATA conference notes and other archival materials; these documents demonstrate a universal desire among educators to strengthen the character and morals of students by teaching them to appreciate beauty and nature.

Excerpts from WATA conferences, speeches, and lectures substantiate just how deeply the leaders were influenced by Transcendental ideology. For example, in her opening address at the 1896 WATA conference, President Harriet Cecil Magee outlines the five planks of WATA's platform. Two of the planks are Art and Nature. In the following excerpt, Magee discusses the importance of the Art plank:

We stand for that art which is the translation of truth and beauty otherwise unrecognized. We hold that the artist is one of the world's few representative men. "Poetry," says Emerson, "was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music we hear these primal warbling"... Is not the teacher of drawing a teacher of art only "when he is so finely organized" that he understands this unknown tongue and helps the little child to translate and interpret? The art we stand for is a translation, and the artist we would be is he of whom the child, when grown to manhood or womanhood, may say: He was to me the world's interpreter; He taught me Nature's unknown tongue; And to the notes of her wild dulcimer first set sweet words and sung. (*NAEA Journal* 138)

Magee's thoughts reflect other writings from Emerson's essay, "The Transcendentalist":

Thus the pursuits of art are enabling. Man is made better by them. He is cultivated, as he never could be by other teachers. To this sentiment alone nature addresses itself; without this the instrument from which it wakes celestial music were untuned or unstrung. Without this there would be no poetry. Man could imagine nothing beyond what he sees, utter no feeling so high as those which nature gives. What chance for creations of his fancy; or better or happier hours than nature brings. But there is a vision beyond the sight, a language besides that of words. Souls seem bound together by a tie from heaven, man can quicken his fellows by high thoughts, noble deeds, holy aspirations. (*Essential Writings* 28)

At the 1909 WATA Conference, the speech of Wilhelmina Seegmiller, director of the Art Department for the Indianapolis Public Schools, provides yet another example of an art educator influenced by Transcendental philosophy:

Three hundred and sixty-five days in the natural world is one of surpassing wonder and beauty. Tho nature is prodigal of her charms, they have worth for those alone who have the “seeing eye”. It is thru the art interpretation of nature, the vision of the painter and the poet, that there comes that quickening of the spirit that makes possible the seeing with the eye of the spirit. Whether our students be six years old or twenty, art training plans ever and ever to increase their capacity for appreciation. Our message is ever, “Come, behold the beauty of the earth!” (1909 WATA 74)

Bonnie Snow (1865-1925), co-author of the *Prang Art Textbooks*, was characterized in her obituary as a leader of the “progressive wing of the public school art movement” (IEM 237). The *Prang Art Textbooks* furthered the belief held by art educators—influenced by Transcendentalism—that teaching the appreciation of art and nature would provide the moral force needed to restore a morally corrupt society. It is difficult to pinpoint when Snow was first influenced by Transcendentalism; however, it is clear that Snow was surrounded by other like-minded art educators that espoused Transcendentalist ideals. Art educator conferences such as the previously mentioned WATA and meeting notes of city and state school boards at the turn of the 19th century

are teeming with examples. The influence of these conferences and meetings was not limited to only those art educators in attendance. A bi-monthly journal entitled *Journal of the National Art Education Association (NAEA Journal)* circulated information from WATA conferences and from city and state school board meetings to art educators around the country. Substantial readership of the journal is suggested in the following quote: “It has surpassed anything in the history of educational journalism, since less than a year it is a regular and welcome visitor to the desks and homes of thousands of earnest teachers located in every State in the Union and in many foreign countries” (*Journal NAEA* 5). Transcendental ideals were circulated across the country through this journal.

The following is one example of the Transcendental influence found in issues of the *NAEA Journal*. The example consists of 1895 meeting notes from a group of Boston art educators, led by John S. Clark: “The pupil should be given an insight into the mutual relations of nature and art, and especially into the significance of labor in the arts and the creating forth of the spiritual life of the worker, and as a contribution to the spiritual life of society...” (*NAEA Journal* 22). Clark’s reference to the spiritual aspect of nature and art is laden with Transcendental philosophy. This is one example of many from the journal illustrating that Snow was surrounded by colleagues, art educators, and teachers who echoed similar ideals.

Snow was the vice-president of the WATA in 1896 and president in 1897 and 1905. In her opening presidential address for the organization’s 1897 conference, Snow, former superintendent of drawing for the Minneapolis public schools, gave a striking description of the way in which this new approach to art education would positively affect societies. She states:

How can art influences best cooperate with other influences to bring about ultimate good to the race? It is our task to work not only for the improvement of the individual, but for the improvement of his conditions of life.... It will be well to remember that our council is but one of many manifestations of the spirit of the times. The magazines and reviews, the lecture platform and the pulpit, abound in discussions of the social question, the relation of man to his fellows, the establishing of a loftier national standard, the working out of the ideal character. (1897 WATA 11)

Snow's address pointed out that WATA's ideals—the belief that art can elevate the human condition—resonated with public opinion. This opinion was influenced by the Transcendental movement whose tenets promoted the idea that immersion in art and nature would result in an elevated moral condition.

Although Snow does not state explicitly that the *Prang Art Textbooks* are based on Transcendental tenets, an abundance of examples throughout the textbooks clearly support the philosophy. The *Prang Art Textbooks*, designed for Grades 1 through 6, invited children to go outside and observe nature. Snow used objects such as animals, flowers, trees, insects, pools of water, and meadows to teach the art elements of line, shape, space, value, form, texture, and color. The *Prang Art Textbooks* were distinguished from former art curricula by the invitation to better understand the art principles being taught by observing nature. The *Prang Art Textbooks* were the first graded art textbooks—a separate textbook was developed for each grade level, and the lessons in each grade level textbook built upon the lessons in preceding textbooks. The *Prang Art Textbooks* were also the first art textbooks placed directly in the hands of the child. Earlier art textbooks were published for the teacher to read and teach from. In contrast, the text of the *Prang Art Textbooks* spoke directly and respectfully to the child.

This marked change underscores another Transcendentalist tenet: the importance and potential of the individual, whether child or adult.

A more in-depth discussion of the specific intended functions of the *Prang Art Textbooks* will follow later; however, it is helpful to provide a clarifying example now. The first page of the *Prang Art Textbook II* shares a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1809-1883), a known Transcendentalist writer in the circle of Emerson and Thoreau. The poem states that God has created nature to teach the child (see figure 1): “And Nature, the old nurse, took the child upon her knee, Saying; ‘Here is a story-book, Thy Father has written for thee’” (*Prang Book II* 1).



And Nature, the old nurse,
took
The child upon her knee,
Saying; "Here is a story-book,
Thy Father has written for thee."

Figure 1. *The Fiftieth Birthday of Agassiz*. Poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, abridged. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook II*, 1904 (page 1)

The pages that follow provide a close-up, color version of a clear pool and reflected sky. Students are invited to come outdoors and paint what they see (see figure 2):

Come out of doors with paint-box and brush! Come to a clear little pool in a meadow! The world is dressed in blue, yellow and green. The green in the distant trees looks blue-green; but the color of the meadow is yellow-green. The pool is the color of the sky. Paint the picture and choose a name for it. (*Prang Book II 2*)



Come out of doors with paint-box and brush!
Come to a clear little pool in a meadow!
The world is dressed in blue, yellow and green.
The green in the distant trees looks blue-green; but the color of the meadow is yellow-green.
The pool is the color of the sky.
Paint the picture and choose a name for it.

Figure 2. *Come Out of Doors*. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook II*, 1904 (page 2)

This example is noteworthy because it reflects Transcendental ideology and it illustrates a method seen throughout the *Prang Art Textbooks*: teaching the elements of art using the beauty of nature. The invitation to go outside and paint the splendor of Spring is followed by an invitation to observe the colors of autumn (see figure 3): “Autumn like bright red and yellow, with orange violet, and deep, deep blue. See how she has dressed our meadow” (*Prang Book II* 3). Thus, the authors used nature to teach color principles by correlating colors with seasons.



Autumn likes bright red and yellow, with
orange, violet, and deep, deep blue.

See how she has dressed our meadow.

Look at the trees and the clear little pool.

What color is the grass? Where is the
deep blue?

Where does the violet look more red than
blue?

Paint an autumn picture of our meadow.

Figure 3. *Autumn*. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook II*, 1904 (page 3)

Indeed, Snow used Transcendental poetry and nature to teach art principles throughout the textbooks; she included myriad pictorial examples of nature to illustrate the lessons. The *Prang Art Textbooks* were infused with Transcendental influence. Because of the widespread acceptance of Transcendental philosophy in educational circles in the late 19th century, educators were eager to find ways they could implement it in education. Snow's visual use of nature and Transcendental poetry to teach an appreciation for nature—the literal face of Divinity—satisfied the belief of art educators that the character and morals of children would be strengthened through the systematic art education offered by the Prang approach.

In writing the *Prang Art Textbooks*, Snow relied on the expertise of many scholars influenced by new approaches to teaching. An advertisement for the *Prang Art Textbooks* in the *American School Board Journal*, listed under the title “New Books,” identifies the other contributors to the textbooks:

When one knows that Miss Bonnie Snow, of Minneapolis, and Mr. Hugo Froehlich, of New York, are the editors, and that they have been assisted by Miss Harriet I. Rice, of Providence, Mrs. M. E. Riley, of St. Louis, Mrs. Alice Cooley, of the University of North Dakota, Dr. Hugo Munsterberg, of Harvard, Mr. Walter S. Perry, of Pratt Institute, and the proven art educator, Mr. John S. Clark, of Boston, he expects a series of books that will surpass any previously published for art education. Among these names are those experienced instructors in art schools, an eminent psychologist, supervisors of drawing in large cities, and those who know the public school field in all its means of development. No disappointment is in store for them who open these text-books with expectant interest. (16)

Research in the collection of historical public school reports, housed in Harvard University's Gutman Library, reveals that school districts across America used Snow's *Prang Art Textbooks* for art education for over a decade.

Although the Transcendental movement had been disbanded long before the publication of the *Prang Art Textbooks*, Transcendentalist philosophies filtered into the ideals of arts educators by the turn of the 19th century. Investigation of the *Prang Art Textbooks* and their associated art education curricula reveals the extent of the impact of Transcendentalist philosophy on art education. Textbooks used in art education prior to the publication of the *Prang Art Textbooks* were based on industrial and mechanical pedagogy; the Transcendentalist ideals on which the *Prang Art Textbooks* were based dramatically set the new textbooks apart from their predecessors.

Chapter III

Methodology and Analysis of *Prang Art Textbooks*

The authors' intended purpose for the images, as stated in the preface of the *Prang Art Textbooks*, provides the context for a discussion of how the text and images function. Snow intended to provide a systematic arts curriculum that interweaves familiar and child-friendly topics to teach principles of beauty. "The illustrations serve the double purpose of illuminating the text and of furnishing the children with standards of work" (Preface).

In *Iconology Image, Text, Ideology*, W.J.T. Mitchell discusses the fundamental complexity of analyzing the relationship between text and image. He concludes that there is no set formula for analyzing the relationship. Analysis depends upon how the text and images operate in individual cases (Mitchell 49). As I analyzed the relationships between text and image in the *Prang Art Textbooks*, I found specific functions built into these relationships by the authors. These functions of the text and images became clearer with a better understanding of the authors' motivations and purpose for writing the textbooks.

What is not spelled out in the preface and yet is the focus of the many pages in the series is the underlying Transcendental construct that observation of and exposure to nature is a direct conduit to enlightened thinking and that the elements of nature have a positive influence on a person's moral character. Throughout the *Prang Art Textbooks*, the author overtly ties nature manipulatives to principles of art in an effort to imbue the child with an appreciation for nature. The reigning belief among many of the educators

of the time, including WATA art educators, was that nature holds a spirituality that positively affects the moral character of the child.

The following excerpts from art educators at the turn of the 19th century represent multiple examples found in education archives that demonstrate the universal underpinnings of Transcendental thought which were used to develop the moral character of the child by inspiring in that child a love of nature and art.

Walter S. Goodnough, Director of Art Education Public Schools, Brooklyn, N.Y., provides a good example of the influence of Transcendentalism:

I hold that first, Art Education should develop the emotional, the ideal, and the moral nature of the child.... Second, Art Education should develop a love and discriminative appreciation of the beautiful in nature, art, industry, literature, dress, home surroundings, and in human thought and action. (*NAEA Journal* 22)

Another example can be found in the remarks of James Frederick Hopkins, director of art education for the Boston public schools and president of the National Educational Association. Speaking at the 1897 WATA meeting, Hopkins declared:

The tendency of the times is primarily toward a recognition that the creation and appreciation of and demand for beauty of form and color in material things, is inseparably united to the individual and social progress and development. (1897 WATA 12)

The aforementioned examples demonstrate how Transcendental dogma was universally embedded within the minds of art educators. By analyzing the images and text in the *Prang Art Textbooks*, I will demonstrate that they are filled with Transcendental tenets. I have identified three main functions of the text and images which illuminate the author's intentions. The three main functions of each text/image relationship are as follows:

1. To teach the principles of visual art: line, shape, color, value, texture, and form using nature as the primary subject.
2. To teach the child to recognize and appreciate beauty through examples in nature.
3. To invite the child outside and into nature.

The images and text share equal representation throughout the textbooks, working together to fulfill one of the three functions. Each image is accompanied by an explanation. The image supports the text by visually communicating what the child is expected to do. The relationship between text and image is constant, but the function shifts throughout the textbook, depending upon the author's desires.

The first function of the *Prang Art Textbooks* was to teach the principles of visual art using elements of nature. In the *Prang Art Textbook III*, the principles of color—value, saturation, and hue—are introduced using a painting of a geranium, a simplified color chart, and a stained glass window (see figure 4). The window includes the colors used in the geranium. The text tells the student,

Beautiful colors are found in flowers. Some are bright and glowing like those in the geranium. Others are soft and cool like those in the violet with its leaves.... The one in the picture said, "See my yellow, orange, red, green and yellow-green! Catch them and paint them if you can!" An artist heard. He caught the colors in the little color scale below. Then he blended the same beautiful colors in the bright stained glass window. Now they are where every day the sun's rays make them glow again as they did in the flower. You can do this. Look at a bright flower with stem and leaves. Paint a color scale to match the colors you see, and blend the same colors in a flower window. (*Prang Book III* 56)



Figure 4. *Stained Glass*. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook III*, 1904 (page 55)

Snow could have taught the concepts of color using a standard color wheel, but, as illustrated by this example, the author chose instead to use a nature manipulative to teach important principles of color, including value, saturation, and hue.

Another example of the first function is when trees, an element from nature, are used as the primary subject to teach about shapes and proportion (see figure 5).



Shapes and Growth of Trees.

No one can study out-of-door pictures without wishing to know how to draw trees. This can best be done by observing from a distance some tree as it grows.

The pictures on this page tell you plainly that the willow and the sycamore, or buttonwood tree, were chosen for the sketches, yet not a single leaf is shown as you would see it if you held it in your hand. What is it, then, that tells the story? It is the truthful drawing of the big things—the shape of the mass of foliage, the height and width of the trunk below the boughs, the size and direction of the branches, and the way they grow from the trunk.

In the sketch of the willow, the many small branches are plainly seen, and you can easily understand why it is that the willow bends and sways so gracefully in the wind. The brush strokes show something of the slender, pointed character of the leaves.

The sycamore is not round and regular like the willow, but shows patches of foliage and stretches of bare branches in a ragged and uneven way. Its shape is very different from the shape of the willow.

Make a large drawing with ink or crayon, from some tree out of doors.

Figure 5. Shapes and Growth of Trees. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, Prang Art Textbook IV, 1904 (page 5)

The second function of the image/text relationship was to sensitize the child to beauty. The text described which aesthetic to look for, while the image provided a visual example of the verbal description (see figures 6, 7, 8, and 9).



An apple growing on a twig is as beautiful as a flower.

See how the leaves hide part of the bough.

Paint the shape of the apple with water; drop in fresh, clear colors.

Study the growth and color of the stem.

Paint what you see.

Figure 6. *An Apple*. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook II*, 1904 (page 22)

When you painted pussy-willows last year, you painted them in grays. Now show them in colors.

The budding twigs of spring often show colors as bright as those of flowers.

Look for color in the stems and buds of bushes, and in the tiny twigs of many trees.

For willow catkins spring chooses her daintiest colors: soft silvery grays; rosy pink; pale green; bits of yellow; and never are two dressed alike! Paint them as they look now.



Figure 7. *Pussy Willows*. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook II*, 1904 (page 23)



Sometimes the setting sun floods the whole world with color.

See how the trees and even the dark earth glow in its warm light. See in the water another sunset sky below.

Watch for the signs of the end of day. Watch the colors as they change, grow brighter, and then slowly fade in the grays of night.

Paint a sunset you have seen.

Figure 8. Sunset. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook III*, 1904 (page 10)



The Out-of-Door World in Autumn.

Have you ever been in the country, or in a city park, after the green of the maple-trees has turned to scarlet and gold? If you have noticed the trees in their gorgeous hues, you have probably found that the grass, also, shows patches of color not seen in the summer-time. The sky is often very blue, and its color is reflected in the quiet water of a lake or pool, or in a gently flowing stream. A smoky haze hangs over the distant trees, and softens, though it does not hide, their brilliant coloring.

Study the sketch on this page. Then paint an autumn picture. Show a bright blue sky, a field or hillside, — once green, but now touched with russet and brown, — a path or a pool of water, distant foliage, and one large tree. Save your picture to use in another lesson.

Figure 9. *The Out of Door World*. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook IV*, 1904 (page 2)

The importance of using art to sensitize children to beauty was regularly discussed at WATA conferences. At the turn of the 19th century, art was well established as a necessary subject of general education in public schools. However, educators decided that teaching mechanical drawing was no longer enough. One of the primary purposes of art was now to foster in children an appreciation for aesthetic beauty. At a WATA conference hosted in Indiana in 1896, Mr. Martindale, president of the Indiana School Board, addressed fellow educators:

The highest value of art teaching in the public schools is that the youth of this country may learn the ennobling and refining influence upon the human soul of beauty. The ideal aim of all art is to deal with the deepest elements of man's nature and destiny. (1896 WATA 9)

Mr. Martindale's statement is representative of many similar declarations made by educators at the annual WATA conferences. Speakers at these conferences taught attendees that the ability to appreciate beauty affects the very nature of an individual. Snow, a member of WATA, understood this concept. They introduced students to the beauty of nature through the use of poetry, images, and instruction in their *Prang Art Textbooks*.

The child's exposure to principles of art—the first function of the textbooks—prepared them to appreciate what was aesthetically pleasing. Images of nature were accompanied by text that described what elements made the image beautiful.

Snow incorporated poetry from transcendental poets in the *Prang Art Textbooks*. The following incorporation of Lucy Larcom's (1824-1893) poem, "Out of Doors," is an example of the second function. It is also of particular relevance to my overall proposal that Transcendental tenets were used by the authors to teach an appreciation for nature. Larcom's poem (see figure 10) represents one of many Transcendentalist poems found within the pages of the *Prang Art Textbooks*.

O U T • O F • D O O R S



... Without knowing, you hold a gift
That a mine of gold could not buy;
Something the soul of a man to lift
From the tiresome earth,
 and to make him see
Now beautiful common things can be;
Now heaven may be glimpsed
 through a wayside tree;
The gift of an artist's eye!

Lucy Larcom.

Figure 10. *You Hold a Gift*. Poem by Lucy Larcom. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook VI*, 1904 (page 1)

At times, the text operates independently to underscore the benefit of developing an appreciation for beauty found in nature, the second function of the book. The following is an example from the fourth book:

Interesting Things Out of Doors

When you were making a special study of landscape, you found that many things out of doors that you had not thought about before, became very interesting to you. You began to notice the colors of the sky and earth, the shapes of trees, the forms of clouds, the change from day to night. These things had always been around you, but you had not thought about them, and so you have not really seen them... A walk in the country, or even along the city street, is never dull to one who is invested in what is going on around him and whose eyes are trained to really see. (*Prang Book IV* 45)

The text is reminiscent of Emerson, who believed that training one's eyes to appreciate the beauties and subtle changes of nature is pleasurable and stirs an individual to higher thoughts (Emerson *Nature* 7).

Explanations throughout the *Prang Art Textbooks* label what is beautiful or identify what to look for in nature, preparing the reader for the third function of the book: going outside and discovering nature's own beautiful compositions. The third function operates as a verbal and visual invitation to go outside. The image works in conjunction with the imperative clause, "Come and play." Through the use of poetry, images, and instruction, the child is invited to go outside and observe, draw, or paint whatever he discovers. The example in Figure 11 illustrates this:



Come, pretty clouds!
I love you, too!
Come and play in the blue, blue sky!
How soft and white you are!
You look like drifts of snow.
You look like clouds of smoke.
I like to tell with my brush
what you look like.

Figure 11. *Come and Play*. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook I*, 1904 (page 3)

The third function also uses the text and images to teach the children by example. For instance, each textbook includes images showing one or more children already outside, engaged in productive and fun activities. Most of the *Prang Art Textbooks* include an “Out of Doors” section. Each of these sections, which gently, sometimes subtly, encourage the children to explore the world outside their front doors, features an image of a child exploring the outdoors and a poem about nature. These idealized images and poetic texts work together to highlight the exemplary child outside, exploring nature.

Images of children, engaged in wholesome outdoor activities such as planting a garden, collecting nuts, fishing, ice-skating, climbing trees, picnicking, star gazing, and sledding, reflect the art educator’s hope that the child will be occupied in healthful, outdoor activities (see figures 12 and 13).



Figure 12. *The Gift of Art*. Poem by Richard Hovey, abridged. Image unattributed. Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook V*, 1904 (page 1)



Figure 13. *O Happy Little Children*. Image unattributed. Rpt. in Snow and Froehlich, *Prang Art Textbook I*, 1904 (page 14)

Chapter IV

Summary and Introduction of Color Book

A demand for a more robust and graded art curriculum at the turn of the 19th century ushered in a call for the *Prang Art Textbooks*. This scarcely examined series of art textbooks espouses Transcendental tenets, even though the Transcendental movement had disbanded at the end of the 1850s. Transcendental philosophies permeated popular opinion and created a viable current in mainstream thought, most readily observed in WATA conferences and other educational archival material at the turn of the 19th century. The co-author of the textbooks, Snow, sought to effect a positive change upon the morals of children in America at the turn of the century by the following means:

- Using nature to teach art principles
- Teaching an appreciation for beauty in nature
- Inviting the child outside

Transcendental tenets woven throughout the textbooks lead the child outside in order to leave the child with a new appreciation for the beauty God has created.

Our generation needs the very prodding and invitation provided by the *Prang Art Textbooks* to go outside and observe raw nature again. Our technological revolution places us in a perilous condition almost parallel to that which existed at the height of the Industrial Revolution. In both situations, children lacked visual literacy and had little appreciation or understanding of beauty. One hundred years ago, society was subject to working long hours in factories. Today, we are subject to working long hours inside the

digital factories of our omnipresent devices. We can benefit from trading pixels for panoramas. It would be of great value for educators to revisit the teachings of the *Prang Art Textbooks* and apply their level of personalization and visual literacy rigor to the experience of today's students.

Influenced by my research of the *Prang Art Textbooks*, and with the assistance of my husband, Michael, I have created *ReDiscover Color: An Outside Guide to Rediscovering Color in Nature*. It has three purposes:

- Help children develop their visual acuity. The color primer specifically addresses observing color, which is a subset in the scope of visual literacy.
- Get children outdoors.
- Encourage children to observe and actively engage with nature.

I have included *ReDiscover Color* in an appendix at the end of this document.

Appendix

ReDiscover Color: An Outside Guide to Rediscovering Color in Nature



THERE ARE COLORS EVERYWHERE.

This book will help you re-discover them. All you need is your eyes, hands, and feet. It's so fun the rest of your body will want to come along, too. Inside this book, you will discover hundreds of color bubbles. In the middle of each bubble is a hole that is missing color. Can you find an object that matches the missing color? Try it out. Go find some leaves. Match a color bubble to a leaf. Lay the page right on the leaf and move the page around until you find the color bubble that matches best. You may have to try several different pages to find the best match.

WHAT COLORS

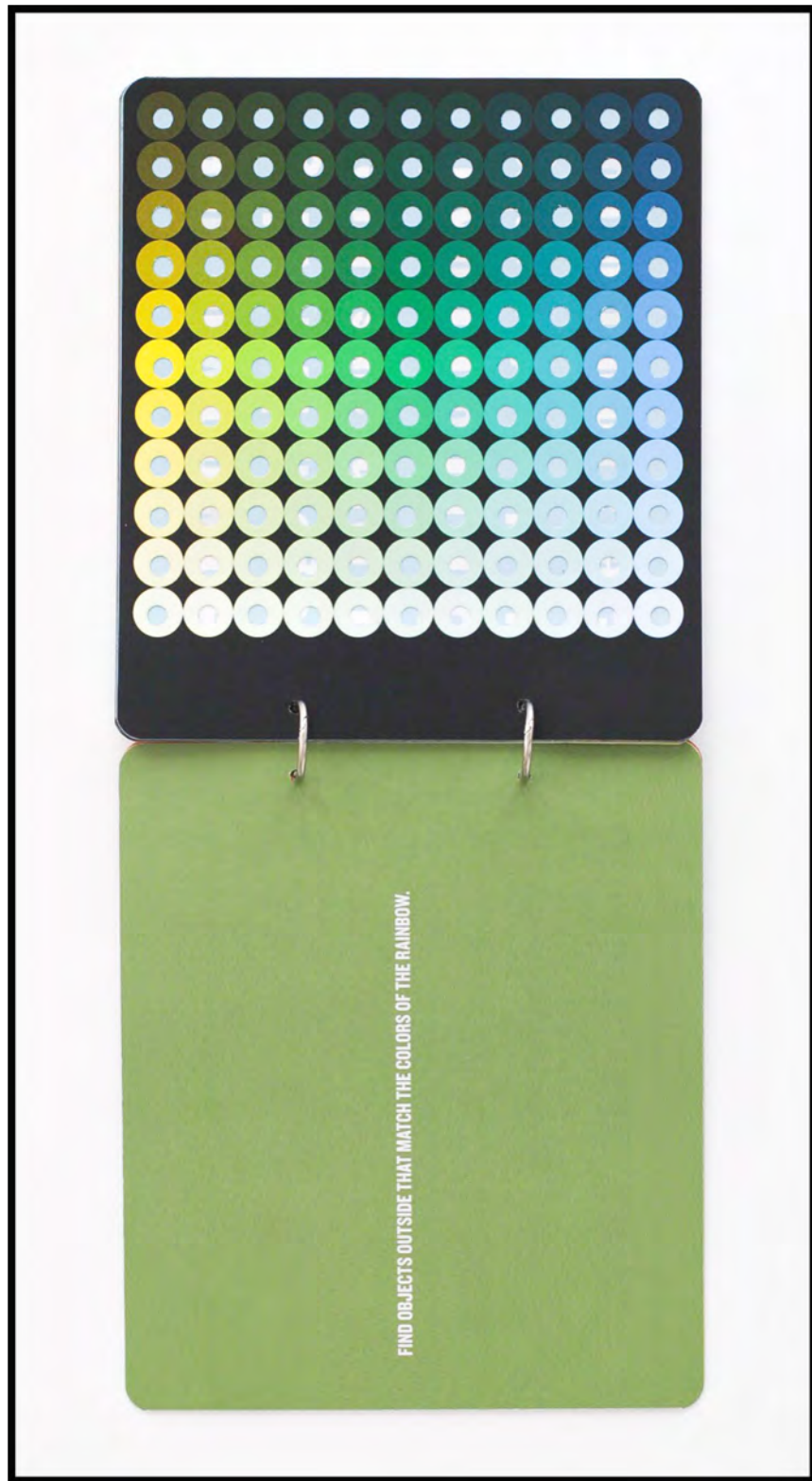
WILL YOU DISCOVER TODAY?

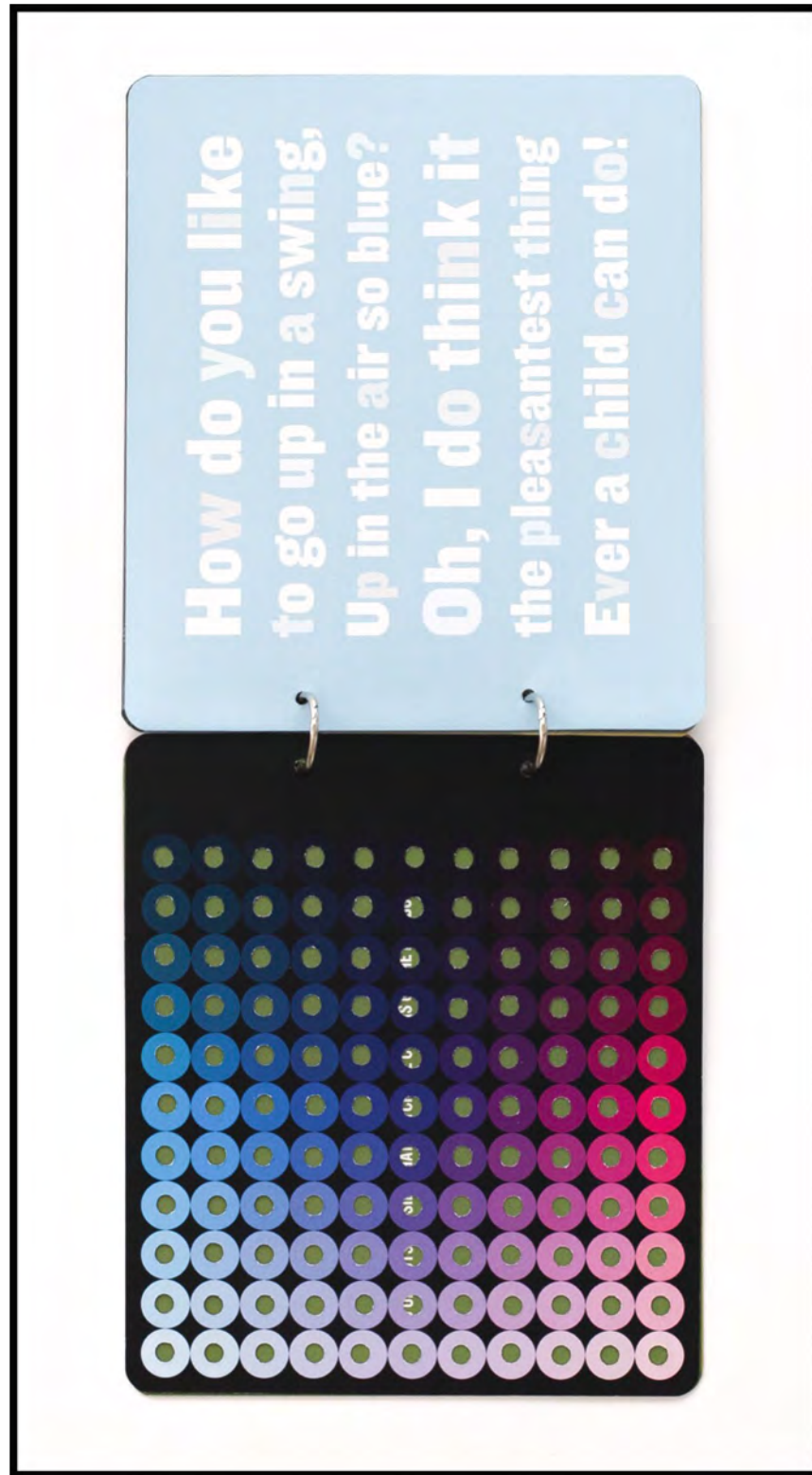
To Emmaline, Thomas, Ella Sophia, and Stewart

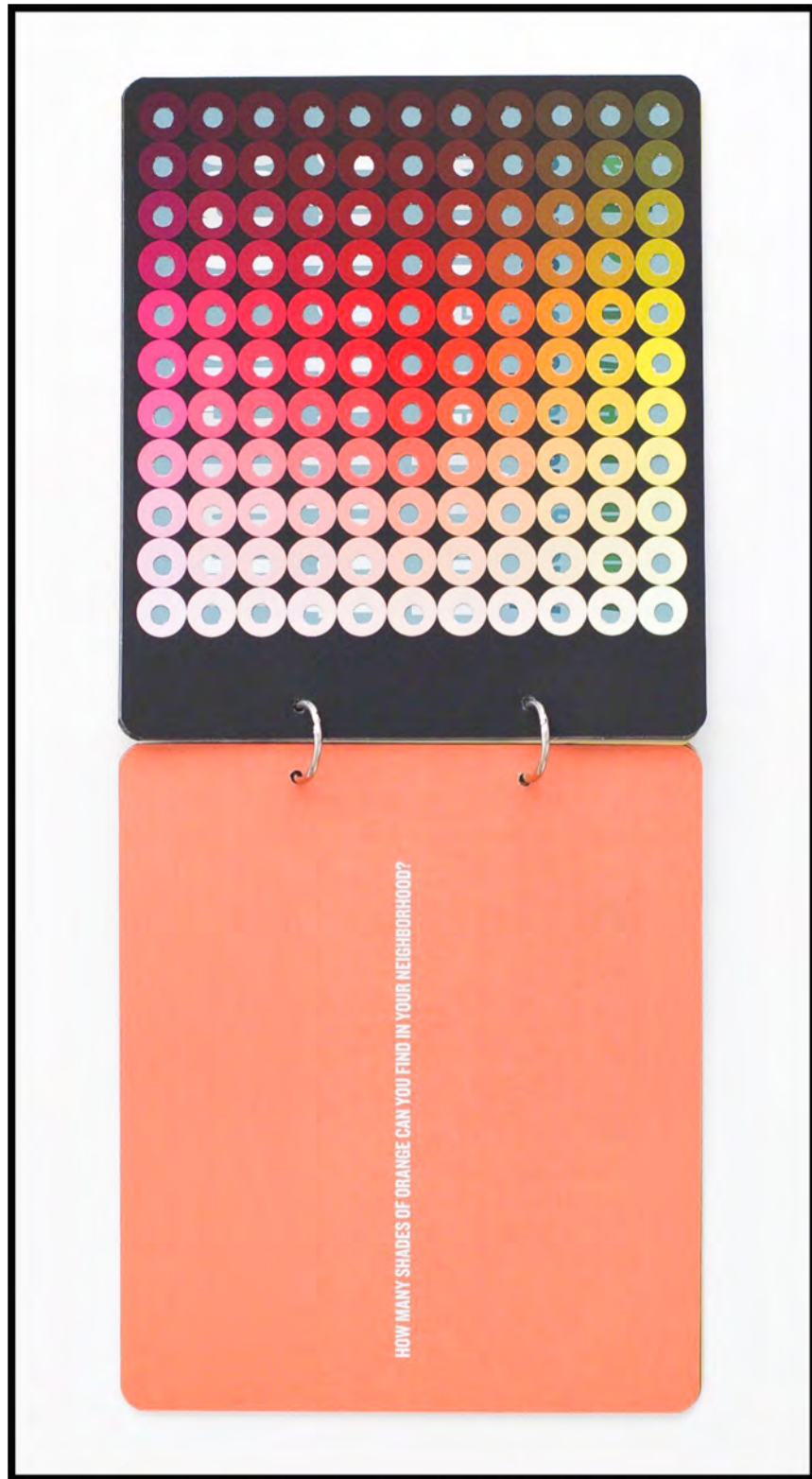
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Every flower and every tree,
And every living thing we see,
Every face which we espy,
Every cheek and every eye,
In all their tints, in every shade,
Are from the rainbow's colors made.



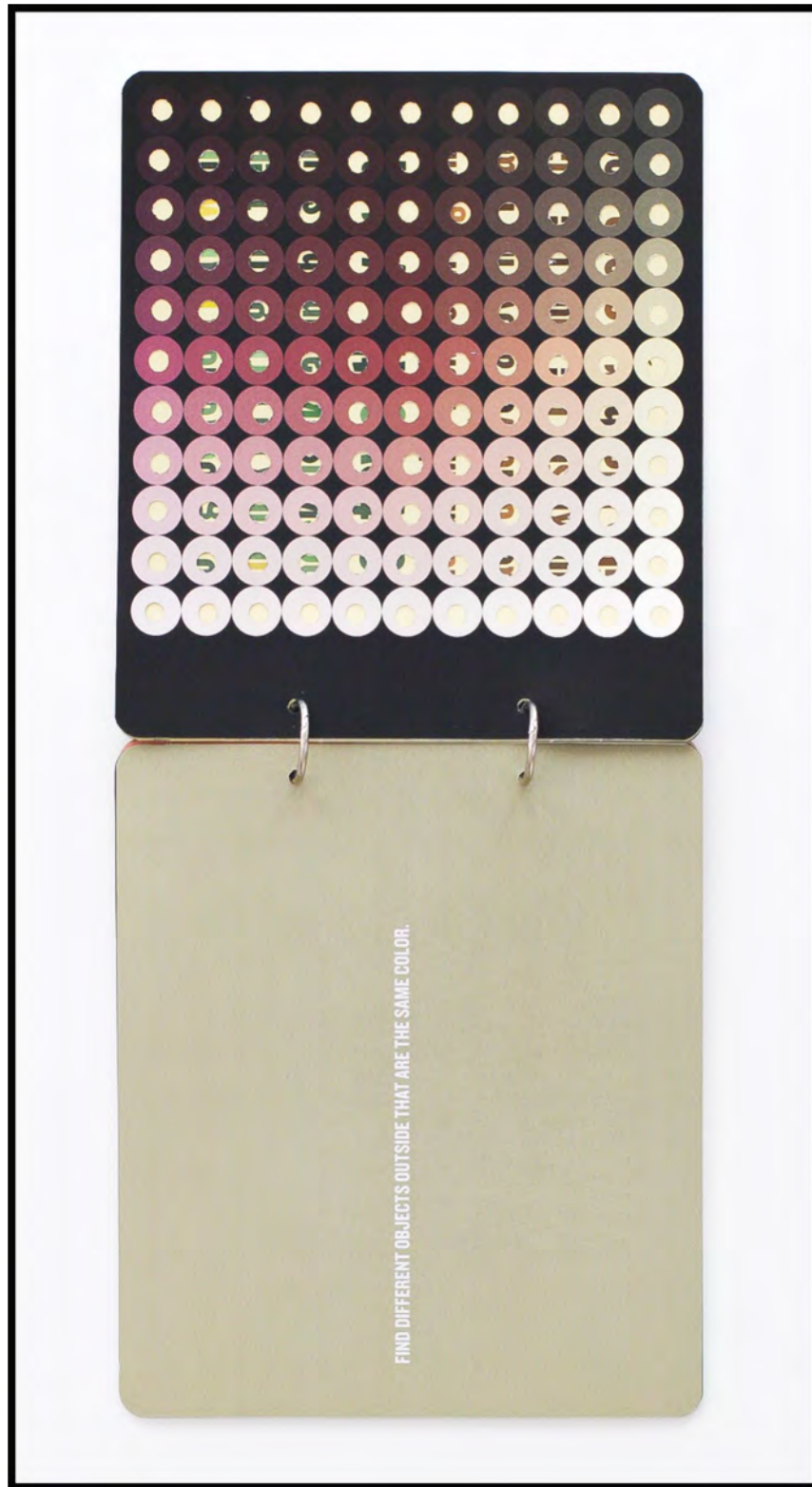




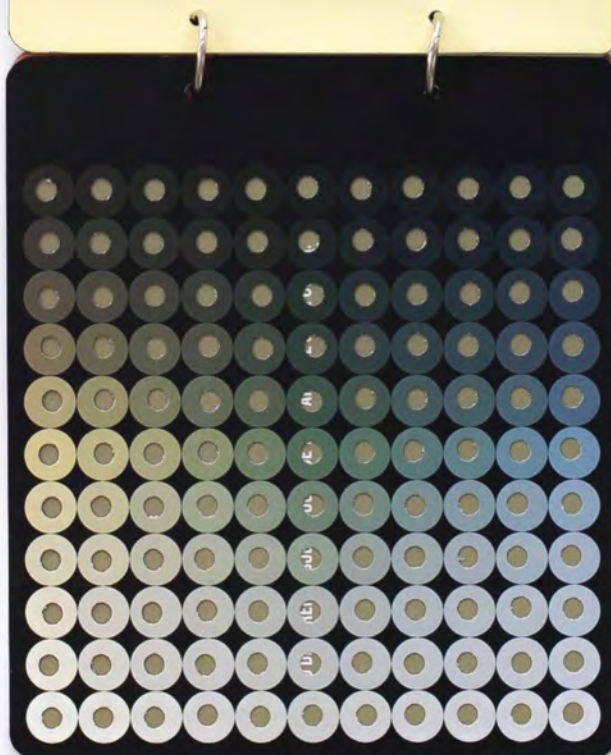


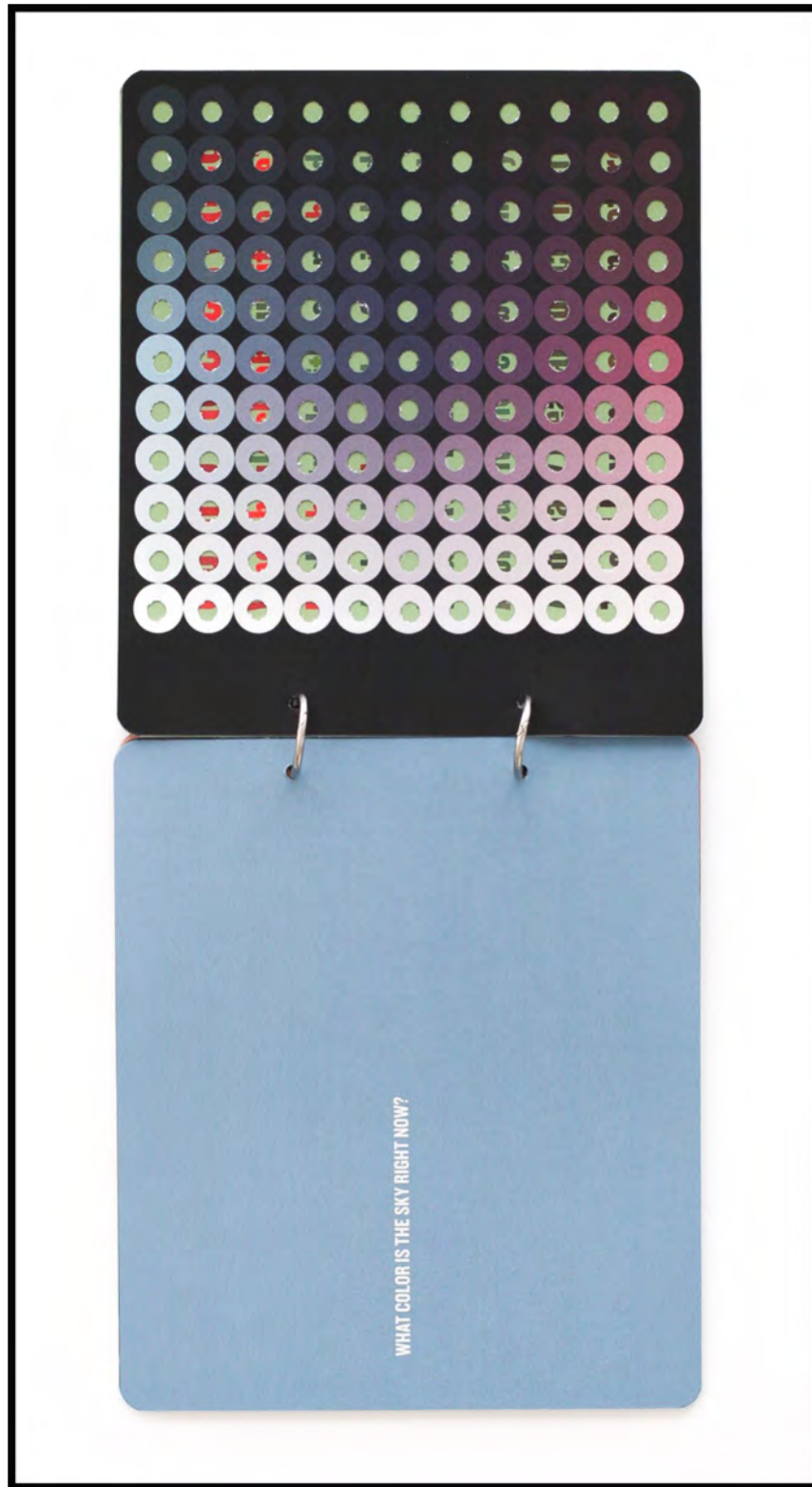




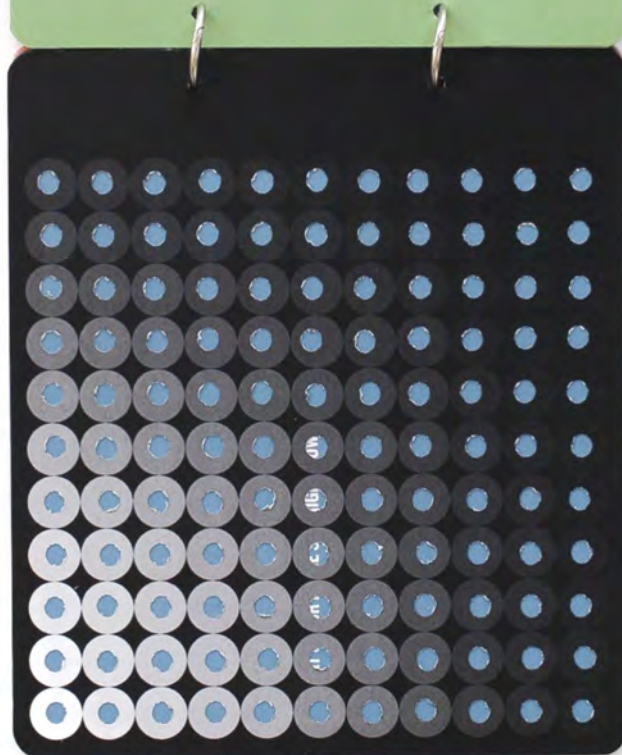


How good to lie a little while
And look up through the tree!
The sky is like a kind big smile
Bent sweetly over me.
The sunshine flickers through the
Lace of leaves above my head,
And kisses me upon the face
Like Mother, before bed.





Up into the cherry tree
Who should climb but little me?
I held the trunk with both my hands
And looked abroad on foreign lands.
I saw the next door garden lie,
Adorned with flowers before my eye,
And many pleasant places more
That I have never seen before.





About the authors:

ELIZABETH STEWART DUNFORD

ReDiscover Color is the creative result of the art curricula research Elizabeth conducted while pursuing her Masters from Harvard University. Elizabeth has a BFA in Music, with an allied emphasis in Photography, from the University of Utah. One of Elizabeth's artist books won the Art Book category at the New England Book Show. Elizabeth and her husband Michael, home-educate their children. Finding ways to engage a child's interest in learning is her passion. Elizabeth developed ReDiscover Color to help ignite children's curiosity about the colors and beauty found in nature.

MICHAEL DOUGLAS DUNFORD

Michael earned a BFA with an emphasis in graphic design from the University of Utah. While living in the Boston area, Michael completed his MBA at Babson College. Michael has worked as an award-winning creative director and designer for McCann Erickson Worldwide.

Elizabeth and Michael have been married for 18 years. They are co-founders of the chocolate company, Cocoa Metro. In fact, Elizabeth and Michael have had the fortune of collaborating on many projects over the years, but their favorite collaboration has always been their four children.





Photo by Elizabeth Stewart Dunford. 2017.

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